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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: SPS CHAIRMAN STAYS OPTIMISTIC ON ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (d).

#### Summary

1. (C) In an October 10 conversation with the Ambassador, Union of Right Forces (SPS) Chairman Nikita Belykh reacted complacently to the effect President Putin's decision to head the pro-Kremlin United Russia list might have on his party's chances to cross the seven-percent threshold into the Duma. "Our voters are lazy," he said, and Putin's entry into the race might cause them to work harder. The "second" pro-Kremlin party, Just Russia, had the most to lose, Belykh thought. He forecast that regional elites would abandon SR for United Russia, and with them would go the all-important administrative resources. SPS would campaign on corruption, for elected governors and more independent regions. Yabloko was unlikely to do well in the elections. On the day he met the Ambassador, Belykh was flying to Krasnoyarsk, then on to Chita, in search of votes. End summary.

Foreign Policy and the Election:  
Not Likely to Matter

2. (C) Union of Right Forces (SPS) Chairman Nikita Belykh told Ambassador October 10 that only events in the Baltics, Georgia, or Ukraine could become significant foreign policy campaign issues. Belykh acknowledged that Kremlin-fostered public opposition to USG plans to deploy the elements of an anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic had forced President Putin's hand: Putin had to look tough, but would have to compromise with the inevitable. Still, Belykh thought that the outcome would have little influence on the campaign.

Putin's Entry Into Race  
Makes Things More Interesting

3. (C) Belykh took in stride Putin's announcement that he would head the pro-Kremlin United Russia's party list. "It makes the campaign more interesting," he offered, and would stimulate SPS's "lazy" voters to go to the polls. Putin's participation would have greater consequences for the second pro-Kremlin Just Russia party and for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR. Administrative resources in the regions, and regional elites, would leave Just Russia for United Russia, while the increase in the number of votes United Russia is expected to win with Putin at its helm would make it difficult for four party's to enter the Duma. Things had gotten better, or at least not worse, for SPS with Putin's announcement, Belykh optimistically concluded.

4. (C) Possibly working in Just Russia's favor, Belykh thought, was party chairman Mironov's close relationship with Putin. That could mean that the Kremlin would "somehow" find a way to have Just Russia represented in the Duma. It is

just as possible, Belykh thought, that Just Russia would fail to cross the seven-percent threshold, and cease to exist with this election.

#### SPS Campaign Strategy

15. (C) In devising its campaign strategy, SPS assumed it would have little media access, and had, Belykh said, focused on door-to-door work instead. In his trips around the country, Belykh was meeting with campaign staff, not voters, in a bid to stimulate their efforts. He had just been in Smolensk, and was leaving after his meeting with the Ambassador for Krasnoyarsk and Chita.

16. (C) Belykh thought that United Russia would campaign on its "Putin Plan," although "no one, including United Russia, knows what that means." SPS would concentrate on corruption; regional rights, including a return to elected governors; social politics (especially pensions); military reform; and the excessive privileges of Russia's burgeoning bureaucracy. Belykh thought the government was especially vulnerable on military reform, where an increase in the amount of money spent on defense had not produced better conditions for the nation's soldiers. It was vulnerable, as well, on corruption. The government's monopoly on power made it more difficult to fight corruption and the problem was getting worse, Belykh thought. In his conversations with voters, it was apparent that the recent, high-profile arrests had impressed no one. There had been arrests of individuals, but no sweeping arrests in offices where corruption was known to be endemic. No governors had been arrested, and arrests were unlikely during the campaign, as governors were needed to deliver the votes.

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17. (C) Belykh offered a practiced answer to the Ambassador's question about the fate of Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov, who had lobbied SPS for inclusion in its list. There had been negotiations, Belykh said, but focus groups showed that in the end Ryzhkov did little to expand the list of potential voters beyond those who would vote for Belykh and Nemtsov. Marietta Chudakova (number two in SPS's federal troika) extended the party's reach. She had gender appeal and a background in the humanities. In addition, Ryzhkov had lobbied for the inclusion of confederates from his now defunct Republican Party of Russia. That proposal was not acceptable to SPS activists, who wanted to preserve party list slots for SPS loyalists.

#### Zubkov as Successor?

18. (C) Belykh termed recently-appointed Prime Minister Zubkov as the most likely successor in a scenario in which Putin was likely to remain in power. Zubkov is "aged," and he has no great political ambition, Belykh thought.

#### Comment

19. (C) Belykh offered thoughtful, in some cases practiced, answers to questions posed by the Ambassador. He seemed to have carved out a strategy for his party that makes a virtue of SPS's comparatively limited access to the media and inability to call on administrative resources. That the advent of Putin at the head of United Russia's list left Belykh unfazed is perhaps not surprising for someone so experienced in the rough and tumble of Russian politics. Still, it seems likely that a Putin-led United Russia can only reduce further SPS's already slim chances of crossing the seven-percent threshold to the Duma on December 2.

Burns